

*Recollections of My Early Life*

*For My Children's Children's Children*  
*Junie's*

*Described by F. Ray Viers*

*--- 1995 ---*

*"No gifts have I of gold or jewels  
My room is cold and bare  
But all the silver sea is mine  
and all the scented air."*

*Lorence Hope*

***Dedicated to the "kids" on Route 219***



## **"PROLOGUE"**

*On the day my mother was to be buried Sam Brill and I stepped away from the funeral home where we had been greeting the well-wishers who had come to express their condolences. Sam said to me: "You know, Ray, you and I have lived in the most exciting of times. We were born early enough to have seen the horse and buggy, and the Model T Ford and we have lived to witness the atomic bomb and the space age. No other generation has experienced so many changes. Can you imagine the wonders our children will experience during their lifetimes?"*

*I have thought of this often, and have wondered at the answer.*

## **"How This Came About"**

Two things happened which prompted me to write the following:

1. When I became aware that those of my parents' generation were fast passing away I asked my uncle Charlie Viers to write down some of his childhood memories.

He only took the time to write that one of my great grandfathers, Ira Collins, had fought for the South in the Civil War, and had been shot through the shoulder. That's all he could think of that he thought might be of interest to other people.

2. When two of the teachers at Hopewell Day Treatment Center, John Dober and Diane Kocab, where I had been working part-time for the past seven years, asked me to speak to their class of my life during the "thirties". I wondered if it is of interest to them, would it not also be of interest to my children and grandchildren?

It is of a time that ended, and can never return, when the Empire of Japan bombed our bases at Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Bear in mind that I was in my 69th year when I started writing this. Yet I am of sound mind, and feel it is accurate.

But I do anticipate some disagreement.



## **"My Beginnings"**

I was born on March 29th, 1926, three years before the stock market crash of 1929 which signaled the start of the Great Depression that lasted for over a decade; until America's entry into World War II.

This, coincidently, is also the span of time which encompasses the part of my life that I am about to describe. . . .

My birth took place in a makeshift apartment over my grandfather William Thomas Walker's store in Hillsboro, West Virginia.

The attending physician was a Dr. McNeil, who, quite possibly, may have also delivered writer Pearl S. Buck some 25 years earlier.

I was the oldest of three children born of my parents, Floyd Harvey Viers and Verna Lillian Viers : nee Walker.

My father was a relatively tall man, standing about 6 feet in height, and slender, weighing only about 150 to 155 pounds. He had dark hair, but became bald at about 50 years.

My mother was a small woman, about 5 foot 2 inches, with pretty reddish-brown hair, and a trim little figure which she kept until she passed away. Quite an accomplishment for a skilled cook and baker who used mounds of lard, salt and sugar in her kitchen.

They were a handsome couple, one thing of interest concerning my mother and father that I think should be remembered by our family.

My father was older than my mother. They had been raised in Greenbrier County in neighboring villages.

When my father came home from serving as an army cook in France during World War I he took a job as a teacher in the grade school at Friars Hill. One of his students was my mother.

It was much the same with Nancy and me, except I taught at Buffalo High School while she attended nearby rival Poca High School.

Also, Nancy and I have other similarities with my parents. I am 9 years older. My father and I are astrologically Aries. Nancy and my mother both Sagittarius.

## "Marlinton --- its Origin"

For most of my first 18 years I lived in Marlinton, West Virginia, located about 10 miles and a couple of hills from the place of my birth.

Marlinton is located in a "Y" shaped valley on the upper Greenbrier River on the western water-shed of the Appalachian Mountains. The "Y" was created by the convergence of Knapps Creek into the Greenbrier.

In 1749 two mountain men, Jacob Marlin and Stephen Sewell, wandered into the valley in search of beaver.

Not anticipating the severity of the winters they were forced to stay over. Shelter was provided by the hollow truck of a fallen sycamore tree.

Boredom of the long winter nights began to take its toll, and, as the story goes, they started to argue over passages from the Bible.

The disgruntled Sewell packed his belongings, and moved down river where he spent the remainder of the winter in a cave. A small stream that flows from that cave today is still known as Stephen's Hole Run.

I know little more of Stephen Sewell, but Jacob Marlin returned to eastern Virginia where he convinced relatives and friends to come with him to his fertile and bounteous valley across the mountains.

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There is another story concerning Marlinton which deserves mention.

Even before Marlin and Sewell, the Shawnee Indians raided a white settlement east of the mountains. They massacred the men and took the women and children captive.



As the party came into the valley off of what is now known as Hamilton's Hill, a small baby, who had been kept hidden by its mother, began to cry. The crying so irritated one of the warriors that he grabbed the little girl-child by the ankles and crushed her into the fork of a tree. This is the first death of a white person on western waters.

I don't know if this really happened but it is a good story and bears repeating. And the O. B. Curry family who lived near that spot in the 1940's and '50 swore that a baby girl haunted their home and was heard crying at night.

## " A Village is Born"

Marlin's settlement began to grow, and soon became known as Marlin's Bottom, the first permanent settlement on western waters.

Since it was situated on the old Seneca Indian trail between New York and Georgia it afforded an easy route via the Greenbrier, the Gauley, the New and the Kanawha Rivers to the Ohio River and on into the West.

This location also made the Greenbrier Valley important to both the Federal and Confederate armies during the Civil War.

In fact, it is said that General Robert E. Lee made his headquarters in the old Toll House during 1863. The Toll House was located at the western end of the bridge across the Greenbrier from Marlinton proper.

There is little doubt in my mind but that "Traveler", Lee's faithful grey stallion, quenched his thirst in the Greenbrier where I would later learn to swim, or that he would graze on the sweet grass where my home would eventually stand.



Marlinton really came into its own in the late 1800's. The large lumber companies of the east found our county (now Pocahontas County) to be a tremendous source of timber needed for lumber and paper pulp.

Thousands of white pine trees were harvested in the mountain forests and stockpiled in the tributaries of the Greenbrier. Here they awaited the spring thaw which would float them downstream to the sawmills near Ronceverte some 50 miles to the south.

Arks were constructed from a portion of the logs so that men, animals and supplies could all float downstream with their harvest.

The trip often took as much as two or three weeks, and it was a cold, dangerous and tiresome undertaking.

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Marlinton was the last stop north before entering those virgin forests; consequently it became a supply depot and gathering place for the loggers, and the town began to grow to accommodate them.

In 1904 a spur of the C & O Railroad was built parallel to the river north from Roncevert. That ended the era of the giant log flotillas. Now the timber could be moved at will, and not with just the rushing spring thaw.

Small sawmills began to spring up in Pocahontas County, and with them a goodly supply of tan-bark. Leather companies built tanneries in Marlinton, Cass and Durbin. Tanned cowhides were shipped to factories in New England where they were made into shoes and sold the world around.

The tannery and railroad, along with lumber, farming and some coal mining kept Marlinton a vibrant town for over half a century.

By the mid-1930's you could find almost anything you might need. There was at least one of everything and often two or three.

For those of you who only know Marlinton as it is in the 1990's let me list those businesses I recall from my high school days.

There was a movie house which replaced the old Opera House on Third Avenue, and later a second theater. A pool room, a bowling alley and

a skating rink. Two restaurants, two snack shops and two hotels. Four grocers, two general stores and a meat market. Two barber shops, a beauty shop, a men's store and a ladies' dress shop and two shoe repair shops. A hardware store and a plumber. Three automobile agencies and a blacksmith shop. A baker, a photographer and two newspapers. Three banks, three large churches, a funeral home and two taxi companies.

A hospital, two or three doctors and two dentists, and two dime stores.

For quenching your thirst there were two dairies, a Coca-Cola bottling plant and an ice company. But there was no "legal" beer, wine or whiskey. It should be noted that the taxis did make frequent out-of-town trips.

Well. What more could you need?

For one thing "Commerce"!

With the exception of lumber, leather and coal there was little to bring new money into town.

It was a sort of barter economy where the many and varied businesses bought and sold one with the other.

The money passed from one person to another and back again, with the business owners making a pretty good profit while the farmers and working class only managed to hold their own.

As automobile travel became more commonplace, the economy suffered even more.



Many people traveled to Lewisburg, Elkins, Clifton Forge or Covington to shop. Mostly it was for the trip, because they could have done as well in Marlinton.

The 1940 census listed 1644 residents. This represents Marlinton at its most populous time.

Gold was valued at \$32.00 an ounce and silver at considerably less than \$10.00.

My father's first job in Marlinton was as a truck driver for the S. B. Wallace drug company. I can remember but one instance concerning him in this line.

I was along as he drove the truck up Court Street. He gave me a large chocolate Easter bunny.

I remember while the drug company was in business that the Army in 1944 bought a number of the trucks for use in the European theater. I remember seeing a number of them in the streets of Marlinton. I was reporting the possibility that the trucks were being used in the European theater.

## "We Settle In Marlinton"

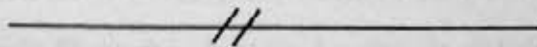
Our first home was a small, one story frame house across the street from the Marlinton High School football field. It was still there in 1995. My sister, June Marie, was born in this house. It was another home delivery like my own.

Since I was only 3 or 4 years old I was too young for memories, but I can recall my friend Audrey Dilley, and the Colsen family. The Colsons were "Tally's" --- that is, Italian immigrants. Mrs. Colsen had a wonderland of plants and knick-knacks from Italy on her sun porch. I was allowed to look, but often heard "Don't touch!"

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I remember little further closeness with my father until I left for the Army in 1944. Before I boarded the train he gave me a carton of Chesterfield cigarettes and a teary smile. I judged it to be pride in his eyes. I was repeating the journey that he had taken 27 years earlier when he went off to war.



As an aside, he probably paid \$1.20 for that carton of cigarettes --- I could buy them for \$1.00 in the Army P. X. If you were to buy them as single packs in a machine today, in 1995, they could cost as much as \$30.00 or \$35.00.

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When I was about 5 years old, we moved into a two-story house on Route 219, about 50 yards north of the bridge and Toll House.

We didn't have much, but it mattered very little because neither did most people in those days of "depression." But our family fared better than many because my father always had a job when as many as one in four did not.

Dad was later hired as a clerk in a general merchandise store. They dealt in groceries, hardware, dry goods and such . . . all the necessities to sustain family life. He held this job until he died in 1964.

Ours was a relatively large three bedroom house on a level spot dug into the hillside. There was a porch which ran the width of the house. I remember three things about that porch. 1. That we had a swing. 2. That Mom had to constantly sweep road dust from it. And 3. later there was an expanding gate purchased to keep little brother Bobby from crawling out into the highway.

My brother was born in this house. Junie and I didn't know he was coming. But on that October day there was lots of commotion and, behold, our family went from four to five.

There couldn't have been more than 10 feet between our front steps and Route 219. Aside from the dust and noise, it didn't matter because cars were few and far between and a fence did separate us from danger.

We kids who lived along 219 got to the point where we could identify each make of automobile by sound. No car has ever made the sound of an early Ford V8, flat-head engine.

Horse drawn wagons were a common site on Route 219 also. The local blacksmith had his shop and a small stable just 50 yards from our house. It was a thrill to watch that burly man in a leather apron work miracles with forge and hammer and a clang, clang, clink-clang of the hammer on the anvil.

And I marveled at the patience of those mammoth animals as he nailed new shoes onto their hooves.

About 100 yards up the road lived the Goodwin family. Parson Goodwin was a lay preacher and caretaker in one of the Bunkers. He raised two children. A son and a daughter. The son, Sidney, became a school teacher and farmer. The daughter, Annabell, was the girl mentioned above.

Parson was raised on the coast of the Canby area -- born of slave parents. He once administered Sunday School and was a lay preacher. He went on to say that the first time he saw his name written was when he had "discovered" it in the sand himself. I cherish the memory of the people there.

With Parson Goodwin had a unique talent. His grandfather, Grandfather, was a lay preacher and caretaker in one of the Bunkers. He went on to say that the first time he saw his name written was when he had "discovered" it in the sand himself. I cherish the memory of the people there.



## "Mom's Job ---- Dad's Chores"

My mother spent a lot of time in the kitchen --- there were three hot meals on our table each day. She accomplished this with the occasional help of a young neighbor girl who liked to tend Bobby and keep Junie and me from harm's way.

We always had food on the table, but what I remember most was pinto beans with cornbread or biscuits. And of course, fried chicken on Sunday! Killed by my father and dressed and fried by my mother.

About 100 yards up the road lived the Goodwin family. Parson Goodwin was a lay preacher and custodian at one of the banks. He raised two children. A son and a daughter. The son, Sidney, became a school teacher and friend. The daughter, Annabell, was the girl mentioned above.

Parson was raised on the coast of the Carolinas --- born of slave parents. He once admonished Sammy Brill and me to work hard at school. He went on to say that the first time he saw his name written was when he had "scratched it in the sand" himself. I cherish the memory I have of this gentle man.

Well, Parson Goodwin had a unique talent. He could slaughter, dress and cure a hog better than most people. Once in awhile my father would buy a pig, give it to Parson to raise and slaughter. All Dad asked for the favor were the salt cured hams.

There are few better meals than country cured ham with mashed potatoes, biscuits and red-eye gravy.

Mom cooked on a wood burning stove. Refrigeration was accomplished with an ice-box that stood in the corner of our dining room. Once a week the ice man came by and placed a 10 or 15 pound block of ice in the compartment on top. He made his deliveries in a horse drawn wagon. On hot summer days we kids loved to chase that wagon and beg for chunks of ice.

Milk was delivered in the same way, but I remember Mr. Waugh did buy a milk truck later. His wares were contained in clear glass bottles with cardboard push-in tops. It was pasteurized, not homogenized, consequently, the upper 1/4 of the bottle contained thick, rich, sweet cream, which had risen to the top.

And I recall cold mornings. I only remember the kitchen stove and a coal burning Franklin stove in the living room as our source of heat, along with the kerosene heater in the bathroom.

Lighting those stoves was my father's first chore on cold mornings. At bedtime he would "bank" the coal stove by covering the dying embers with fine grain coal. This would smother the flame, but it "banked" the hot coals. Done properly, they would last all night. Next morning, all he had to do was stick in a poker, stir the coals to let in the oxygen and, "poof", the fire leapt to life again.

I recall one Christmas in particular. It was cold and there was lots of snow . . . as in most memories. Junie and I were anxious to see what Santa had left for us. But, the fire had gone out, so we were forced to sit in the dark on the stairs until Dad could restart the fire! How cruel! After all, it was 5:30 in the morning and Santa had been there.

I don't remember what we got for Christmas, but I do remember waiting in the dark in new flannel pajamas.

Junie and I were rather close, but I'm sure there was sibling rivalry on my part. She was a scrappy, skinny little tomboy who, with skirt tucked into leg holes of her panties, could run, jump and tumble with the best of us. But, she most enjoyed playing next door with Anna Bell Curry, 1/7 of the group that later became Junie, Anna Bell, Dotty Lee Waugh, Helen Curry, Katherine Pritt, Bib Whitt and Hattie Woodell. They were all my "sisters".

## "The People's Store"

The store where my father worked was a large store, "The People's Store and Supply Company," a sort of K-Mart of the times. It was located on Route 219 at the west end of the bridge.

Across the street was Brill's Esso Station, another source of wonder to me! Both were owned and operated by Ira D. Brill who had come to town from a job as a bookkeeper with a large lumber company. Brill was father to one of my first best friends . . . more about Sammy Brill later.

The store was operated by clerks who worked from behind a large "counter." These clerks served the customers personally. After a friendly "who's next" the clerk took your order and retrieved the items from the stocked shelves, bins and tables. As each item was located all were assembled in an orderly pile on the counter where they were rung up, or registered in your charge account book, before they were bagged for the customer to load or tote home. It was all informal and leisurely since the clerks knew the customers personally and by name.

Emerson Sharp was the third clerk, and he had the best job of all. He drove the store truck. His job was to deliver goods and groceries around the town and out into the countryside. Orders were placed by phone or mail, or maybe placed on Saturday when all the mountain folk came to town to shop. They would often leave an order list for delivery later in the week. Sammy and I sometimes "helped" Mr. Sharp.

Brill not only sold, he bought. Potatoes, chickens, eggs and wool were common. Twists of tobacco and dried gin-seng root were occasional,



the latter being a valuable medicinal plant.

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Like me, my father always found joy in association with young folks. And again, as with me, young people seemed to like him. That's not boast, it's fact. Sammy and Lois were drawn to my father after the untimely death of Mr. Brill. Sam tells of going to the air vent register in their hallway directly over the store where he would yell down to Dad, "Viers --- Viers, Gum!" Dad would attach a piece of chewing gum to the long measuring stick which was used to determine how much gasoline remained in the tank at the station. With this pole he could push the gum through the ceiling vent and into Sammy's eager hands.

And my father was also chosen on rainy days to deliver us kids to and from school. The Viers, the Brills --- all who could crowd into that little car.

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My sister reminded me of the following --- something not too well known. You will probably guess why. Remember, Lindberg's flight occurred only a few years earlier. Airplanes were new and exciting things. A relative of Brill's was a race driver and was interested in flying, as was a young man who worked for Brill. They decided to build an airplane --- a two seater. They took over a large section of the upper floor of the store and started to fulfill their dream.

They had finished the fuselage and one detachable wing when . . . you guessed it. They suddenly realized they would not be able to get it out of the building! Their enthusiasm subsided and their project rested there, a home for spiders for 10 or more years . . . the best laid plans. . . .

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At about this time, Carl Sheet, owner of the local electric company,

also became interested in flying. He acquired a large field on top of the hill near the fair grounds and built a two stall hangar (with a wind sock). Thus equipped he bought a small Piper Cub and learned to fly. The amazing thing is that Carl weighed about 300 pounds and his little airplane not much more. But, he and his son "Chizle" did fly and were the envy of the town.

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One day an exciting thing happened. A large Ford tri-motor plane was forced to land at the little air field. Due to its weight, it bogged down in the mud, and there it sat until the soil dried enough to get it airborne. As a "thank you" for the hospitality shown, the pilot took a number of people up. And here's where my memory fails. Was I one of the passengers? I think I was, but it does seem inconceivable now. But you can bet your boots that I found some way to get onto that airplane and take a look around.

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Late spring was an exciting time at the store. Spring was when the new lambs came, and when sheep were sheared of their winter wool.

Brill's store was one of three, and probably the largest, wool broker in Marlinton. The farmers brought their freshly shorn wool to town in bundles which were weighed and purchased by the pound.

In one of the back storerooms Emerson Sharp was in charge of the month-long operation of packing the wool for shipment. First the wool was unbundled and stored in a large common pile. Never washed, it reeked of the sheep smell of lanolin and of the farmyard.

A square frame was attached to the rafters horizontal to, and some seven feet above, the floor. A large metal ring lay on top of this square and an open six-foot long burlap sack was sewn to it.

Sharp recruited several older boys and men who would toss the loose wool up and into the open sack. When there was a foot or so of wool in the bottom, one of the boys would climb in. And as the wool was tossed in, the packer would tramp the wool down tight with his feet, more wool, more tramping, until the sack was full. The sack was then sewn shut with binder's twine threaded through a six inch long steel needle.

Once full and secure the bag was stored on end at the far side of the room. This process was repeated over and over, for maybe one hundred times until the room was filled with six foot tall sacks of wool each weighing over, or at least, 300 pounds.

Now this is where the fun comes in. We young guys, me and Sammy and Juby and the others would climb on, over, around and through this messy maze of smelly, oily towers as if they were our own fortress. We would slide down cracks between and squeeze through openings left. What adventure. . . until we went home where our moms fussed about our smell and made us take an extra bath. But it was worth it. And we went back again the next day.



Saturday night held another adventure.

After the doors were locked and the money counted Emerson or Dad or Kyle Curtis went hunting.

Mice and rats are always a problem in a place where so much food is available. It was especially so in those days before D-Con and the Orkin man. The usual solution was dirty old traps. But at the store another method was practiced.

On Saturdays the store was open until 9:00 pm. The clerks took turns staying even later, and armed with a flashlight and a .410 shotgun, built on a pistol frame, they hunted through the store rooms for these hungry night creatures. Emerson Sharp, in particular, liked this duty. Eight or ten victims were his usual bounty.

Dad didn't participate that often. He had no affinity for guns or hunting, but he did have a run-in with a mouse on one occasion.

He was in the back warehouse room where feed was stored. Rock salt was stored there also. He saw a mouse run behind a bag of feed which stood beside a block of salt. Thinking he might be able to smash the little intruder he reached down to move the 20 pound block.

The frightened mouse stood his ground and bit my father on the end of the little finger on his left hand.

On Monday they amputated the blood-poisoned member between the first and second joints. But it was too late. On Wednesday they cut again, this time below the knuckle hoping to get all the infection. It worked.

He proudly wore this "Red Badge of Courage" to his grave, and jokingly repeated the story many times to young inquiring minds. He even had a pair of gloves made from Pocahontas buckskin. The left one with only a thumb and three fingers. This was another source of conversation for him.

When he died I took that pair of gloves, but lost them before I realized how precious they might become to me.



Many of my best memories involve that magnificent old store and the people who worked and dwelled there.



I mentioned Mr. Brill's untimely death. Ira Brill was an avid outdoorsman. And Sammy inherited that trait from him.

Customers coming into the store told of a flock of Canada geese setting down in the Greenbrier at the fairgrounds. Now Canada geese do not normally come through our mountains, so the local hunters had to take advantage of it.

Mr. Brill was one of the lucky ones. He bagged his goose.

A few days later, though, he died of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, supposedly from the bite of a tick or louse carried in by the geese.

Sammy was only ten or eleven.

## "My Closest Friends"

My closest friends number two, one from each end of the financial spectrum; Juby Ervin, from a large and magnificently talented family of little means, and Sammy Brill, from a large and magnificently talented family with money.

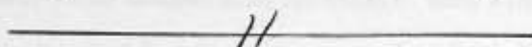
Juby was small and he had an overlapping front tooth. We were inseparable to age ten or twelve. We played cowboys and Indians all up and down Route 219. He was one of only two of his family who could not play a stringed instrument and sing the latest of the Grand Old Opry songs.

The most amazing of his brothers and sisters was Dude. He was a hydrocephalic with a giant head too heavy to be carried on his small body. He developed a crooked back and legs, and his legs atrophied. But he was bright and he could play almost any stringed instrument you would hand him. He could have been, he should have been, a professional, but he was too terribly deformed. The public would not have accepted him.

From early morning we played together, Juby and I. We liked to play in his rickety old barn that hung on stilts over the river. We also hung around the blacksmith's shop when Mr. Weatherholt would allow it. We built roads for our toy cars in the lifeless soil under Emerson Sharp's garage. This garage, and two or three others like Juby's barn, stood on stilts over the river.

The families with no indoor plumbing had a two-holer built on to the rear of their garage or barn and flushing was a natural happening when the Greenbrier was high; a two or three day long flush.

Juby and I liked to play in the hills, too. Playing cowboys, we usually reenacted the chase that we'd witnessed at the movies on the Saturday before. I liked Buck Jones and Bob Steel. Juby liked Charles Starrett and Ken Maynard. Neither of us liked Gene Autry. He was too "wimpy." Hoppy was a "comer." Roy Rogers was yet to be heard from. But you talk about heroes, we had them. And we could slap our hands on our thighs as we loped along, making a sound almost exactly like a galloping horse.



My other close friend was Sammy Brill. Sammy and I were very much alike, but he was always nine months older and one hundred dollars richer, not to mention he was that much smarter also.

I was never jealous of Sammy. I knew he had more and I accepted that. He always included me and I included him. And we always shared.

The Brills lived in a group of rooms over their store. Today you might call it an apartment. But it was really too grand to be called anything other than a home.

There are three areas in that home that I remember best: the long porch with the swing overlooking the river where Aunt Mabel tended her beautiful flowers and the sunroom overlooking the west end of the bridge where Grandma Moore held court. The third was a small anteroom in the center of the house where Sammy and I played with two wondrous toys, one for our mind and one for our imagination.

To stimulate our mind, Sammy had a microscope. We could see no germs or microorganisms, but a human hair became like an iron bar, and a fly's wing was a thing of wonder.

For our imagination, we played with his toy soldier kit, a kit to make toy soldiers. An electric ladle was used to melt the metal, which was carefully poured into molds to produce the small figures.

If a drop of sweat accidentally dropped into the hot metal, a splash resulted. It didn't happen often, but once a small splash of metal popped onto my left hand between thumb and forefinger and I bear the scar to this day. It's not very recognizable after sixty years but I could show it to you if you wished.

The other thing we did, but not as a team, was to build model airplanes. And Sammy was quite good at it. He had the patience. From this hobby, we learned to identify most of the World War II fighter planes. I liked the Gruman Hellcat and the P51 and the Flying Tigers' P40.

The Brills had a most magnificent car, not a limousine, but larger than a sedan. There were two small seats which folded up and into the back of the front seat. These seats were where Sammy and I rode on the few occasions when I was privileged to ride in that beautiful old grey Buick. I've never seen another car quite like it.

I feel that a lot of the tolerance and compassion I feel for people today came from being sandwiched between these two great friends and for loving each for who he was.

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I also had a couple of older friends whom I visited from time to time, one more than the other. Gertrude McNeil lived just two houses away. It was a small house, but she filled it with kids. Four, if I remember correctly. My favorite was Patricia, beautiful and loving. When I was about twelve and



baby-sitting, I took her to the movie but it was about cowboys, so she forced me to take her home.

Mrs. Bulifaunt and her husband owned a restaurant at the Toll House. She liked to have me drop in from time to time. Years later, when I was in high school, I met her in Roncevert where she and her husband were managing a hotel. She greeted me as an old friend.

I cannot explain my close relationship to these two old women. Maybe we just liked each other.

Mr. Alley Hill (no pun intended) and his family lived in a farm home on the crest of the hill north of Main Street. In order to get to his house, he dug a really nice roping path from the back of the Toll House to his property on the top of the hill. This path not only gave easy access to the new old right-of-way and into the forest, it was also lined with high-voltage box grape vines, some dangling thirty or forty feet from the tops of the trees that supported them. Many vines were as big as a person's wrist. A few crops with a handful and you had a grapevine swing for the kids' birthday parties.

The hill rose at a grade of about 40 or 50 degrees so with a good launch from the proper perch you could soar but be firm and hold on high off the ground. But what a sight you got in the vine pulled back and held from its mooring to drop with a second jump right back to it.

So young the vineyard vines were with my friends. The vines

## **"The Hill and the River"**

I mentioned that our house was on a level spot graded out of the hillside along 219. Ours was one of five or six so located. The hill started right in back of our house and rose to an altitude of seven or eight hundred feet, maybe more.

Some time earlier, two roads had been graded in along the side of the hill. The upper, close to the crest, seemed to give access to a limestone quarry just opposite where the tannery was located in the valley. The other, about halfway up the hill, may have been the original Route 219 prior to hard topping.

Mr. Alley Hill (no pun intended) and his family lived in a fine home on the crest of the hill overlooking Main Street. In order to get to his house, he dug a really nice zigzagging path from the back of the Toll House to his property on the top of the hill. This path not only gave easy access to the two old rights-of-way and into the forest, it was also laced with high clinging fox grape vines, some dangling thirty or forty feet from the tops of the trees that supported them. Many vines were as big as a person's wrist. A few chops with a hatchet and you had a grapevine swing fit for any teenage Tarzan.

The hill rose at a grade of about 40 or 50 degrees so with a good launch from the proper perch you could soar out ten or fifteen feet and as high off the ground. But what a fright you got if the vine pulled free and fell from its moorings to drop, until a second limb might catch it!

In spring, the wooded hillside abounded with wildflowers. Trillium,

bloodroot, crocus, rhododendron. We loved to pick them and take them home to Mom.



If you followed the old upper road near the crest of the hill through the shaded forest to the rock quarry you would find a large rhododendron grove. Take the path up the hill through the grove and soon, on level ground amid a wooded area of oak and hickory and dogwood, you would find the pines. That's what we called it, The Pines. Two large spruce trees growing side by side as if they were one. It was no challenge or even a problem to climb this natural step ladder to a height of forty-five or fifty feet, where, amid smaller swaying branches you could view the surrounding woodland and the open fields in the distance. One felt akin to the eagles.

It was a place of escape, alone or with friends. You could climb to this place where the air was clean and free of odors, save the smell of pine resin, and you would leave all cares forty feet below. And that we did.

Usually it was Juby and me, often Sammy or someone else. We would carry a bottle of Pepsi and a couple of candy bars and set off for The Pines. To open the Pepsi was no problem. We would just punch a hole in the top with a nail that we had in our pocket, shake the bottle a little and squirt that warm but delicious pop into our parched mouths. With the addition of a half-melted Baby Ruth we could enjoy what might be considered the second best meal in the world!



With the coming of the last half of the thirties, the Depression was waning. We kids didn't know it. We had other things on our minds. We played cowboys and Indians during the day and hide-and-seek at night when the warm spring sun sank behind Lone Tree Knob.

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We scratched little triangles in the dirt along the roadside and placed a marble in each corner of the triangle and played marbles. We drew a line back some ten feet from the triangle and there's where you started from. You'd shoot your "shooter" towards one of the three marbles in the little triangle and if you knocked one out you got a second shot, and so on and so on. We played "keeps" and often it was losers for me.

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In the heat of July and August we baked in the summer sun as we swam in the Greenbrier. Sun shield hadn't been invented, nor was it even deemed necessary. A favorite thing was to slap a red back, not so much fun if the red back was your own.

We stacked flat river rocks in a row some five or six feet from, and parallel to, the riverbank, creating a channel where we could walk and play and watch the crawdads and the chub minnows in their natural habitat.

Our personal swimming place was mid-river, at the Rock. The Rock was the goal of all under twelve years of age. It was a rather large flat iron-shaped sandstone washed into place by some ancient ice floe or flood and, since I could not find it last time I looked, I suspect it washed out again in the same manner.

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Another feature of the Greenbrier that fascinated us kids was the abundance of wild creatures that lived there. In the channel and under most flat rocks, you might find a fat brown crawdad with menacing claws or a scary-looking hellgrammite that looked like an underwater centipede. Both could pinch a careless finger and bring about pain!

But the monster of the shallows was the dreaded water dog, a horrible underwater salamander of about ten inches in length. It was said to



bite and hold on even with its huge head cut off. The big boys told us so, so we had no reason but to believe that it was true. But no one could ever remember it having happened.

The charmers of the river were the sunfish, the rock bass. We called these short wide fish "goggle-eyes", very descriptive but not very nice for so friendly a little fellow. They were always thrown back.

Also tossed back were the big ugly mudsuckers. They were bottom feeders so we were absolutely sure that they ate hocky!

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We enjoyed the river in winter as well, when the crystalline ice covered it from shore to shore. How exciting to stand on top of the place we had only a few months earlier called our swimming hole. Or to scrape away the snow to see our little fish swimming below.

Ice skates came out of closets all over town. We who were young and inexperienced marveled at the skill of Dempsey Johnson and the speed and the jumps of Jack Sharp as they practiced the thing for which they had become famous.

Not so thrilling and much further from the warming home fires were sledding jaunts up Jericho Road. Although we loved it we always came home with chattering teeth and trousers frozen into icy stovepipes clear up to our knees. Two pairs of socks could not keep our feet dry, nor leather mittens keep our fingers warm, but we loved it.

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During the weeks before and after swimming season, the spring and the fall, it was roller skating time. We had steel wheel skates which were clamped to our shoes by using a skate key. They looked like little

skateboards. In fact, the ancestors of today's skateboards was a three- or four-foot long board with the wheels of a roller skate attached to each end. That's why we call them the "skate" board.

We had two or three favorite places to skate. Of course, the beginner skated on the sidewalk in front of his house or maybe in the highway. Remember, cars were few and far between.

As we grew older and more proficient, we could roam further from home. The tannery, which had closed in the early thirties, provided a wonderful place. A slanted walkway that led to the base of the towering smokestack, which no longer served a purpose, gave us a thirty- or forty-foot moderate grade upon which to coast.

The truly independent could skate all the way up to Court Street and skate around the courthouse. That is, until one of the deputy sheriffs got tired of us and sent us to look for other sidewalks.



Roller skates and bicycles gave us the mobility to expand our social horizons and to make friends in other parts of town. And this we did. But it also exposed us to unexpected danger.

I hadn't been riding a bicycle very long, when I decided I could do one of the things that the older boys do. Coast down Price Hill. I didn't anticipate or practice a few things like leaning around sharp turns or braking at fast speeds or looking down the road ahead.

I was about halfway down the hill. Just as I approached that last sharp right hand curve I could see coming around the first curve up was a Model A Ford Coupe. I stomped on the brake of my bicycle (really it was

Junie's bicycle). Head over heels into the back panel just in front of the rear fender, over the Ford I went, followed by the bicycle, and into the gravel along the side of the road. I had bent the bike's fork to the point where it was no longer rideable. I had scratched my knees and elbows and I destroyed my pride.

I pushed the broken bicycle to Brill's station where my father stood waiting. Word had beaten me to the bottom of the hill.

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Now, I don't remember learning to ride a bicycle, or to swim, or to skate, but recently, in July of 1995, I was reminded of another person who served as a mentor and friend to me and the other kids on Route 219 when we were very young.

His name was Carmen Sharp. He was the son of Emerson Sharp, who worked at the store. Carmen was the oldest of the guys on 219 so he was really not considered to be one of our small group. He was more the chairman of the board.

During the 1995 Pioneer Days celebration in Marlinton, a group of us had gathered around the steps of the bank. Pioneer Days is a sort of county reunion where old friends meet often after having been separated for fifty years or more.

After all the cordialities and the friendly remarks and queries as to how long has it been since....since, whatever, Carmen asked me if I wanted to go camping up on the hill. Noting my questioning look, Carmen told the group that he had taken me on my first campout, that he had taught me how to swim and to skate. Now I don't remember any of this. But I don't doubt it because his remarks have since brought about brief flashes of memory...of a rugged lean-to on the hill...and of being encouraged to let go of the inner tube.

Carmen, being older, might well have been that person who urged us all, the kids on Route 219, to swim or to skate or to try out new things. He most certainly was the older boy we all looked up to, the one with the cheerful disposition that inspired confidence in ourselves. We wanted to do the things that he could do, to be like he was, even to dress like him. But that attire will be described later.

No one ever mentioned the exact wage my father earned (my father was a private man) but I understand he worked a 60 hour week for about \$25.00 a month. I think that might have been close.

That isn't to say Ira Brill was a miser. Quite the contrary. Three families and his own survived the depression on the wages paid from that business. A store that was mostly a credit business with customers paying what they could, when they could. And remember, in those days there were no food stamps, no welfare and no social security.

Many people had a garden. We had a small garden of the hill in back of our house, and later on Hamilton Hill. I recall it was a year of the "17 year locust" which bothered Mom because we kids were so curious.

Many without jobs created their own. I remember one man who had a wheelbarrow with a basket attached to it. He chopped kindling and peddled it for 10 cents a basket.

Gentle old Jim Shinnot --- heavy and blind --- sold the Charleston Gazette from his spot on the steps of the Bank of Marlinton. Some people did odd jobs, but few begged. Mountain folk are very proud.

Many young men in America saw no other way but to give up and hit the road. We called them hobos and tramps. Later, I learned that "hobo" comes from the word "Hoboken", a city in New Jersey where easterners sneaked onto freight trains. "Tramp" because they tramped across country, following the warm weather. These are not derogatory titles. We understood their circumstances.

Since Route 219 was a major highway, hobos traveled it often. My mother was always an easy mark. Often these men would stop at our door and offer to work for food. They were never refused --- there was always kindling to chop. After they had moved on, Mom would have me look for "secret marks" penciled on our gatepost. These marks told others of the brotherhood what to expect at that particular house: food, money, clothing, rejection?? I was told if I found a mark to remove it, but being of her blood, I left it more often than not.

These men sometimes camped in little shanty town communities on the outskirts of town. These little houses were built of large boxes retrieved from local business trash piles. Their form might only be that of a lean-to, but they provided shelter.

One such shanty town existed under the railroad bridge at the mouth of Knapps Creek, but I'm not sure I ever saw it. And Junie tells me that her husband, Ed Wagner, and Bert and Johnny Sheets had a shanty there that they played in.

## "Automobiles and Family Fun"

Since we lived only twenty yards from my father's job, you may think we had no need for an automobile. Not so. Cars were always important to us. First of all, we had the weekly journey to Hillsboro to visit Grandad and Grandma Walker. We also made the annual trip to visit Grandma Maggie, Nancy, Martha and Charlie Viers. This was not the most enjoyable trip because it was a long hard ride, mostly on dirt or gravel roads.

The first car I can remember was a model T, but I think it must have been a loaner. We didn't have it very long. The one that sticks out in my mind as being first was a '29 Chevy Coupe. I stood between Mom's knees and hooked my fingers in a crack between the windshield and dash. Junie was in Mom's arms.

Later we owned a green '32 Chevy Sedan and then a black '36. The '32 is the one well remembered. I don't know the particulars, but it suffices to say that Anna Bell Goodwin slammed the door on little Bobby's fingers, resulting in stitches and an hysterical teenage black girl.

The '36 was driven until 1942 when it was replaced with a 1940 black Chevy. That's the car that lasted out the war, and most of the kids in our batch of friends learned to drive using that faithful old Chevy.

There was Mom, Dad, "Sis", little Bobby and me --- the average sized family. But the family was not yet quite complete. One Sunday we drove to Roncevert to visit Uncle Albert and his second wife. He was my father's first cousin whose first wife was my mother's sister, so we were doubly related.



When we came home we brought my cousin Eula along. She became a part of the family when she was about fifteen years old. Junie and I never asked why. We just took her for granted. There was lots of merging extended families during the depression. Her brother, Arthur, a childhood role model for me, and my oldest cousin, Hester, already lived with my Grandma and Grandad Walker.

Eula was a typical post-flapper era teenager with her rolled hose, cropped hair, her makeup. . .and she could "jitterbug." I remember her talks of movie and radio stars. And you should have seen her collection of movie magazines.

Still not a complete family, we needed a dog! We got one --- whether as a gift, or purchased, or maybe he adopted us, I can't remember. He was a beautiful little guy that we named "Poodle," and I think he was a poodle . . . much like Buster, my granddaughter Heather's, first dog. He loved us, but mostly he loved the green Chevrolet. If we went to the movie, he tagged along, and waited for us, asleep under the car, until the movie was over.

On Sunday, when we went to Hillsboro, no matter how hard Mom scolded him, he would chase after the car halfway up Price Hill. Junie and Bobby and I would watch out the back window until he finally gave up. It broke our hearts.

This is not to say that our car was used only for practical purposes. To the contrary. We also used the car to enrich our lives and to get away to ourselves.

I remember two big vacations which we really enjoyed. Each lasted a week.

During the summer of my twelfth year we went to Washington. I remember the year because I wore my new Scout uniform. This was our first visit to a large city, and we saw everything! We were never lost, though Mom accused my father of it quite often.

One other summer we went to Buckroe Beach in Virginia. How we all managed to get into that small car and travel four hundred miles from home is beyond me. There were six of us plus luggage, and Lucille Hannah, a friend of Eula's, went along.

Later I remember my father bragging to friends at the store that the vacation cost him \$50.00, "but it was worth every penny." Fifty dollars for a week's vacation! I guess Mom must have packed our lunches.

## "Mumps, Measles and Medicine"

In those days before miracle drugs you were all but guaranteed at least one childhood disease per year, usually in January, February or March. Measles, mumps, chicken pox, whooping cough, I had them all. I think the hardest to endure was chicken pox when you couldn't scratch, but I could not ignore the scab on the end of my nose and have the scar to this day.

Mumps I didn't mind because I got ice cream, probably more than was necessary.

I remember another thing about mumps. I was told that a boy must be still and not jump or run or they might "go down on you". That meant mumps could make you sterile, but because no parent would discuss such a thing with their kids, my interpretation was that for the rest of your life you would have great big testicles. I walked very quietly and cautiously. . .even after the mumps had run its course.

I think it was during my bout with measles that I felt doubly cursed. There was a wonderful knee-deep snow which I could only enjoy through the window. (Now, my mother's bark was usually worse than her bite except for an occasional "I'm tired of it" whack, but on this particular occasion I guess I deserved a whack!) I had recuperated to the point where I was really enjoying my malady, but I yearned to enjoy the snow as well. Our back yard was a winter wonderland.

My plan was to only peep out the back door --- to sniff the snow --- to experience its nip inside my nose --- to feel the chill air through my flannel pajamas --- but I could not resist its beckoning call. I leaped into the white

pile my father had left when he shoveled the path to the wood-shed that morning.

Mom screamed at me and my measles. She yelled something akin to "wait till your father gets home". Well, I survived that thirty second encounter with Jack Frost, and it was a fair exchange for any punishment it might have brought about, but gentle Floyd probably only scolded me, remembering when he was a boy he may have done the same.

Ext side A



## "Doctoring in Marlinton"

In those days medicine and doctors were not so specialized as they are today. A lot of people died, often of influenza or pneumonia.

There were four doctors attending Marlinton in the 1930's. Dr. Norman Price, his brother Dr. Jim Price, Dr. Howard and our family doctor, Dr. Yeager.

When you were ill you didn't go to the doctor as you do today. They came to you. They made "house calls". And during the seasons of frequent illness they even made their "rounds" of house calls. What pride I felt when Dr. Yeager tacked a "quarantined" sign on our front gate as he left. Everyone passing knew there was "measles" in the house, and I didn't have to go to school.

These were all country doctors and also past their prime, so it was a welcome thing when young Drs. Hamrick and McClure came to Marlinton to practice. By the time America entered World War II, only these two were still in practice and that caused a problem.

Conscientious Dr. Hamrick, who I'm sure knew better, destroyed his fingers, and eventually his practice, by setting broken bones without rubber gloves under a radium fluoroscope. Dr. McClure took over much of Hamrick's practice, which made constant care a problem.

Penicillin was new, and of the consistency of thin syrup, consequently it had to be injected with a large thick syringe. When Mom became ill with the flu an apologetic Dr. McClure could do no more than give her a syringe, a supply of penicillin, and instructions for self-injection. She had to give

herself a shot every four hours. Dad was at work, we kids were in school, Eula had grown up and left. Mom had to do it, and she did, because influenza was one of the killers in those days. I watched only once. She sat on the side of the bed, crying --- with needle in hand. For maybe one half hour, until, finally, she rammed that long match-stick size needle into her thigh. She cried --- I cried, but she did it. And she got well.

It was just a crude box made, right by one of the trees with one window and one door. But the one who owned it was a playhouse. Inside we got a half bed, a small table and probably a chair. It was a simple shanty just right for climbing upon. It was made of logs and the back of it was on a level with the roof of our house. From it we could see the back yard and the river across the way.

One summer a neighbor, Warren Harmon, and I spent an afternoon in the playhouse.

When we moved "up river" Floyd had our playhouse hauled along to his back. Transplanted to a low spot on the bank of our property. It became his chicken house. Later it must have been washed away by high water, but not before it had served its purpose.

*Memories of my boyhood*

## "The Little House on the Hill"

I don't know where Dad got the idea. Neither Junie or I asked for it....we certainly didn't beg for it, but all of a sudden one day Joe Shoemaker showed up with hammer and saw, and when he left, we had a playhouse.

It was just a crude box some eight by ten by six feet in size with one window and one door. But no one else around had so grand a playhouse. Inside we put a half bed, a small table and probably a chair. It had a slightly slanted roof just right for climbing upon. It was anchored into the hill in back of, and on a level with, the roof of our house. From it we could view the back yards and the river across the way.

One summer a neighbor, Warren Hannah, and I slept in it on many a warm night.

When we moved "up town" Floyd had our playhouse hauled along on Brill's truck. Transplanted to a low spot on the back of our property, it became his chicken house. Later it must have been washed away by high water, but not before it had served its purpose.

*Music until end of page*

Side B on tape

### "A Big Surprise"

I had quite a few friends in my early youth but I cared little for playing games or sports. I was often satisfied with being a loner and doing the solitary things. Not only did I like to draw, I loved the movies and seldom did I miss one. Of course, I liked the cowboys, Tom Mix, Buck Jones, Hoot Gibson, Hoppy. And I liked the old Warner Bros. musicals. I think my first love must have been Ruby Keeler. But Dick Powell had her and I respected that.

It was a pleasant surprise when my father somehow got hold of an old piano. He put it in our least-used but better-furnished room. It was a huge old upright with sliding doors over the keyboard. And therein lay its treasure. It was a player piano, equipped with twenty or so tattered paper rolls perforated with little holes. As air was released through the holes it activated the keys and the piano played itself. The hitch was that you had to pump the pedals to activate the mechanism. But I sat there hour after hour, delighted to sing the words that rolled by.

Isleg copy

I particularly liked "Red Sails in the Sunset", "I Love Capri", and "All I Do is Dream of You". They were the popular songs of the day. That old player piano whetted my appetite for music.



## "Other Talents Surface"

Also at about this time, other creative talents began to surface. I sang with the radio. I loved the music. I also started to draw with my pencil on whatever would accept my mark.

Then I discovered something wonderful! Just up the road was a clay bank --- wonderful cold moist clay was exposed by the roadside. I found that I had a talent for turning that raw clay into small statues of animals and Indians. I gave them to everyone, and I gained some self-respect in doing so, because people liked them and they displayed them.

I was about ten years old then. And now, sixty years later, I still have a talent and a love for three dimensional carvings and sculptures. And all of this because of a little clay bank on Route 219.

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But I was not the only person along the river whose creative bent was surfacing. Probably Miss Anna Price Hunter had dabbled in the arts before since she was well on in years. Miss Anna was rightfully proud of her name and heritage.

The Prices were one of the early families in Pocahontas County. When I first became aware of the family, there was Cal, editor of the Pocahontas Times, Doc Norman, Doc Jim and Anna. All but Cal seemed a little bit eccentric. And I think they owned the old Toll House as well.

The Toll House was an old two-story log cabin, which had served at various times as a toll station for the ferry and bridge, as a post office, as Lee's headquarters, and, now, in the thirties, as a tea house and a restaurant.

It was furnished and decorated as you might imagine: rifles, powder horns, deer heads, various old bits of copper pots and antique pottery and tools.

A mostly glass addition had been added to house the restaurant. The Toll House was a rather popular place for the middle class; a gathering spot and a meeting place for the Rotary Club.

Miss Anna decided there should be one more addition. Calling upon the skill of a local jack-of-all-trades, Henry Aston, a four-foot high pedestal of river rock and cement was built beside the road and a tent-like shelter was erected over this. Inside crawled Miss Anna, dressed in smock, gloves and head scarf. Thus equipped for the mission at hand she began her task.

Now the reason I've dwelled on this so much is that her mission was much the same as mine. But hers was far more grand. While I was molding little Indians in clay, Anna Price Hunter was sculpting in cement a life-size statue of General Robert E. Lee, complete with sword.

It was a surprisingly good likeness and it stood there for a number of years, until she probably decided that it had been there long enough. So she had Henry tear it down and she replaced it with another well done bust of an Indian chief.

It was said that Henry posed for the Indian. It could be, but his brother "Boots" would have been a better model. He showed more of their Indian blood but, alas, Boots was serving time at West Virginia State Penitentiary and was unavailable.

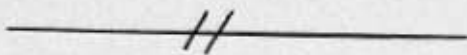
Henry was paid enough to start building a small house up on the hill,

but he never finished it. And, by the way, while he was in her employ, I think he built the stone and glass addition to the Toll House, as well as the stone house which stands at the foot of Price Hill.

Boots, well, Boots served his time, changed his ways, and though he was much older than I, we became pretty good buddies when I was in my early twenties, and fresh back from the war.

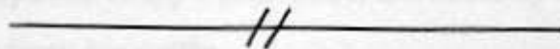
## "Movies --- A Big Part of my Life"

When I was about ten years old, movies were a very big part of my life. Whenever possible I went to the theater, first with my family, and when I was allowed to cross the bridge alone, I went by myself. Especially to the matinees, where you got a cowboy, a mystery, and a cartoon and serial chapter sandwiched in between, and all for 10 cents. But that's not the story I wanted to tell.

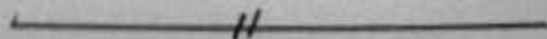


About 1935, movies were designed flashy, colorful and classy. They portrayed a side of life that most could only dream of; men in tails, ladies in lavish gowns, dancing in spic-and-span art deco clubs and hotels. This was intentional, to help us get away from our humdrum life for ninety minutes or so.

But often that was not enough. So theaters used Bingo, dish and pottery giveaways, vaudeville acts and bank nights. Your ticket stub was placed in a drum which was spun around and around until it stopped.



Miss Gertie Shea had bought the old Seneca Theater and renamed it the Alpine Theater. Gertie was the star of that stage as any blue-blooded man age twelve and up would attest. With two long gorgeous legs always covered in leg makeup and perched on high heels, she caused men's hearts to beat faster and wives' blood to boil. And that included Dad and me, and Mom and Eula. Oh yes. . .the stub that she drew from the drum meant money for the holder of the other half of the ticket. I almost forgot to tell you that part. . .but Gertie would do that to you.



As an aside concerning vaudeville, on one occasion, there were two young comedians, one slender and tall, one short and stout. The first time I



saw Abbott and Costello, I wondered, could that have been them? The skit was the old "who's on first" routine which would make them world famous a few years later. And they had to have been someplace in 1937. Maybe it was in Marlinton.



Sometime during the end of the thirties, '37 or '38, I was very happy to learn that a new movie house was opening on Main Street. It was to be called the Rex Theater (now don't confuse that with any son-in-law you might know).

I could hardly wait because the opening feature was to be an old Hoot Gibson movie and the Boris Karloff classic "The Mummy". Now that bothered me a little. I had intentionally missed "Frankenstein" and I had hidden my eyes through a better part of Henry Hall's portrayal of "The Werewolf of London". But as I figured it the new theater would operate on the same format as did the Alpine, first the cowboy, then the short subjects, and then the mystery. But I was wrong. Before I could get a good start on my 5 cent bag of popcorn or my 5 cent Coke, the Mummy's eyes opened and he started to move from his coffin.

I ran out the front door of the theater and across the street to the pool room and I stayed there until I was absolutely sure that the Mummy had been done in. I sneaked back and peeped in only to find that my timing was off. The Mummy was gone, but, alas, so was most of Hoot Gibson. But, always after that, I was very cautious upon entering either theater so that I wouldn't encounter the Mummy there in the dark.

~~///~~ omitted on tape

Odie Johnson and his wife owned and operated a large restaurant on Main Street. It was located two doors from the pool room, almost bordering Third Avenue.

It was said that Odie had been a lumber camp cook. That's very likely because he had the knack for preparing hearty food for large groups.

I had been to the movies on that June evening in 1938 that I am about to tell about. (Yes, I looked up the date.) When I came out of the theater I noticed a large group of men and boys gathered on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. I knew immediately what was going on.

Radios were just becoming popular. Only a few families owned them and reception was poor. But tonight was special. Mr. Johnson had moved the large radio he had in the restaurant onto the front steps and tuned in KDKA, Pittsburg.

The crowd grew silent as the ring announcer introduced Nazi Germany's Max Schmeling who was about to challenge the young American, Joe Louis, who held the world title.

Adolf Hitler had boasted that his giant would defeat the smaller black champion from Detroit.

The fight lasted less than one round. Schmeling went back to Germany humiliated.

This was the first of many Joe Louis fights we listened to on Odie's big radio on Main Street in Marlinton.

## "A New Deal"

Sometime in the mid-thirties we started to notice the older people were displaying a new attitude, an excitement, a renewal. In 1932, a young man from New York had been elected president. His name was Franklin D. Roosevelt, but he soon became simply FDR, an appropriate designation for one who seemed so fascinated with initials.

FDR had a way of making people feel good. Heavy of build and with a broad smile, he was obviously well bred. He had an uncanny way of talking to common people. He could make you feel good about yourself. He did this, in part, with weekly radio programs that he called "Fireside Chats".

"We have nothing to fear but fear itself", he told us. He promised a New Deal.

Soon after his election as president, he closed all the banks. A bank holiday. How simple. With the banks closed, no one could withdraw their savings, thus keeping banks solvent when many were failing as a run on the bank occurred. This happened to Marlinton's Farmers and Merchants Bank, which later reopened in Franklin. *(Summersville in file)*  
*correct*

He created jobs where no jobs had been. Infrastructure jobs, building roads, dams, bridges, parks, even the Marlinton water filtration plant. These things happened in programs he started, programs assigned initial names like WPA or CCC, all under the umbrella title of NRA, the National Recovery Act, whose symbol was a determined-looking blue eagle clutching gears and sheaths of grain and lightning. Daring programs, which many partisan politicians today would say were unconstitutional.

With the WPA, Works Projects Administration, not only were roads and such built and repaired but entire towns were erected. Homestead and Eleanor, named for Mrs. Roosevelt, were two such towns in West Virginia.

Nancy, my wife, your mother and grandmother, was raised in Eleanor.

The WPA paid musicians to play, actors to act, artists to paint.

Orson Wells' "Mercury Theater of the Air" was such a project. Remember him? He scared the hell out of America one Halloween when he convinced everyone that the Martians were coming.

CCC; Civilian Conservation Corps, was a paramilitary conservation organization with Army-style camps set up all across the United States. Each camp was similar to an Army Corps of one hundred. Their efforts were directed by Reserve Army officers. These efforts are still in evidence as state and national parks today. Camp Watoga became Watoga State Park. Camp Seneca became Seneca State Forest, and so forth and so on.

But the camp wasn't necessarily made up of local people. A young man from Marlinton might have been stationed in Oregon. Or a Texan may have served at Seneca. What excitement when on a Saturday afternoon Army truckloads of tired, energetic and passionate young men in green uniforms pulled into town. They came from every direction. And they had money in their pockets, twenty-one dollars a month. And fun on their minds. Suddenly the pool room, the restaurants, the stores, the movies, everything began to prosper.

There were fights, even knifings, both between camps and with the locals, but what else could you expect when five hundred hardy and energetic young studs invaded town.

The commander of one camp was a tall dignified Captain Howery. He and his family came from another part of the state. His daughter Louise, with blond hair and blue eyes, was just my age. But, alas, I could only love her from afar. We were only in second grade and I was supposed to hate the girls. But HLH was in my heart even after the camps were closed and they'd moved on.

Years later, when I was in high school, she returned to Marlinton to visit Marguerite Shiffler. John Johnson and I spent many warm evenings on the Shiffler porch; John with his Marguerite, and I with my first puppy love, blond-haired, blue-eyed Louise Howery, now a gorgeous teenaged beauty.



## "Trumpets, Cornets, and Bugles"

I don't know where the idea came from. In Sammy's case, it was probably some family conversation as to what sort of musical instrument he might want to play. All of his sisters were fine musicians.

As for me, it was more likely my dreaming through the John Plain catalog at the store, pleading with my father for a \$19.95 LaSalle cornet. Just like the one that Johnny "Skat" Davis played in Ray Noble's orchestra. I saw him in the movies. He was my first musical idol.

Anyway, Sammy got his Blessing trumpet and I got my LaSalle cornet. I was in fifth grade.

John Davis went on to become the leader of a society band which has played for several presidential inaugural balls. No more "Skat" Davis, now the very dignified John Davis.



Sammy and I took lessons from an itinerant music teacher named Joe Compolio. We both did fairly well, but I gave up on the lessons after sixth grade and stashed the cornet away for a year or so. I had learned the rudiments. I could play whatever I liked, so I was satisfied to pursue other pastimes.

It all seems a bit foggy here. I did have a little Cavalry bugle that I enjoyed. When I was mid-way through my freshman year, though, I regained my interest and I auditioned for band director Bill Powell. The next day I found myself playing beside Sammy in the high school band.

## "We Wander Further from Home"

By 1937, we all began to wander further from the nest. Juby and I ventured further up Route 219. Sammy and I ventured further into the hills. We each picked up new friends along the way. Sam, notice, no more Sammy, being nine months older, joined the Scouts. But I had to wait. I wasn't yet twelve.

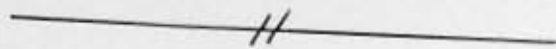
The following March he asked me to go to the Scout meeting with him. With 50 cents in my hot hand, I went along. Everyone was there, guys I knew, guys I only knew of. I knew Billy Michael and Stanley Moore and Tom Moore and Charles Edward MacElwee, Tappin Thomas, Dick Moore, Tommy King. They knew of me, slightly. Wow! These were the big guys.

Mr. Jack Richardson was the Scout master. He taught Biology in the high school. He greeted me with a smile and then he did something that remains a mystery even after 57 years. And one I refuse to ask about. Jack told me to go sit in the little anteroom adjoining the Biology room where the troop meetings were held. I was told there was business they had to take care of.

Now, that little anteroom held shelves full of jars containing chemicals and specimens collected over the years. The only place to sit, as directed, was on a bar stool, behind which hung a full-size human skeleton, illuminated by nothing except the light from the streets. I really don't know how long I sat on that stool. I do know that, though it had time, the skeleton did not lay a bony hand on me as I suspected he would. But I was mighty relieved when Jack said, "Okay, Ray, welcome to Troop 33".

...as there really business to be taken care of?  
Did I really get through that ordeal without wetting my pants?

Anyway, we liked being Scouts and we became a good service unit for the community. I was at one time the bugler, a position I was really proud of. The early morning bugle was not appreciated by the older guys, who had stayed up late playing "Hearts" and smoking cigarettes. They even hid my bugle.



I can remember going camping with the Scouts but twice. Both were disastrous; one even more so than the other.

Our first trip was up on Williams River, at the foot of the mountain where the scenic highway is located. It was only for a weekend but we couldn't finish even that. The rain started about the time we got to the cabin. By midnight we realized how ferocious a storm it was. The next morning one of the leaders hiked to the nearest phone to call for Brill's truck. Emerson could only get to the CCC camp. We had to hike about two miles with all of our gear to meet him there. We had to wade across Williams River three or four times. Each time the water was deeper. We lost no one but some of us lost our gear. Now, Emerson Sharp is no Tom Cruise, but he sure looked good on that miserable Saturday afternoon!

The other was at Blue Bend, in Greenbrier County. For a whole week! We camped in heavy canvas-wall tents similar to those used by the Army. And we cooked over an open fire.

What made this trip unique was that a girl scout troop from White Sulfur Springs was also camping at Blue Bend. There was some socializing, but nothing overly serious went on.

But I was a bit of a clown and a tease in those days, and as all too often happens, I guess I crossed over the line where teasing got personal. The subjects of my teasing chased me into the woods, where, in the dark, I stumbled over a stump and cut my shin and my knee. For the rest of the week I hobbled around with an overlarge bandage on my leg, and I made up tales for those who wanted to know what had happened.

Current Events full of us here  
but not in here.



## "A Summer Winds Down"

We all enjoyed the summer, we kids along Route 219. Swimming season started with the first of July and ended with Labor Day, give or take a week or two at each end. Bright summer days with singing birds and sluggish flies abuzz. We knew nothing of smog or pollution, save the fragrance of the wood-burning and coal-burning stoves.

In summer we wore bib overalls or BVD tank tops, but no shoes. In June when school let out we were allowed to go barefoot, and by September the soles of our feet were as tough as tannery leather, and neither gravel nor hot asphalt posed a problem.

August signaled the final month of summer fun. The climax of those joyous months was the county fair. We knew the fair was coming. It had been announced on small banners wired to car bumpers or tacked on telephone poles. The large billboard on the hill near the Toll House pictured a snorting brown trotter pulling a high-wheeled sulky, whose goggled driver gave the appearance of whipping him onto the bridge and down Main Street.

The fairground was about a mile and a half out of town. You took Route 219 north to the Flamingo. Now it's called Miss Kitty's. Then you turn to the right as if you were going to Brownsburg. As you came to the place where the road forked up Brownsburg Hill, you could see it. Golden lights gleaming in the dusky sky. And if you were really quiet you could hear it too. It was the ferris wheel --- the gigantic arch above the tents.

Cars were backed up for 1/4 mile waiting for their turn at the little white ticket stand. By then you could hear more music from different rides,



but the most glorious came from the merry-go-round; the hobby horses. With the clanging tinkle of the calliope and its rattle of snare drum and the thunderous bump of the bass drum and the crash of the wire hoop on the brass cymbal.

How did Mom or Dad ever imagine that Junie and Bobby and I could stay still or keep from hanging out of the windows!

And you could smell it, too, the fair. The sweet smell of cotton candy, the hot grease of hot dogs and hamburgers, the buttery smell of popcorn, and the livestock odors. You could smell them also. But it was wonderful! It was County Fair! It had sneaked in during the night like Santa Claus, dressed all in red and white and gold.

At first it came by train and later, on big trucks with long flat beds attended by scruffy-looking people who could raise and lower it like a hundred umbrellas. Those in colorful clothes and wearing earrings were called gypsies, but I didn't know why. I only knew I was afraid of them. They promised Mom they could tell of her future.

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My favorite fair was in 1942. That year Troop 33 camped on the hill overlooking the midway. We were there as a service troop. My job was that of fair mail-carrier. Twice a day I loaded up the basket on my bicycle with outgoing mail, pedaled it to Marlinton's post office, reloaded it with incoming mail, and returned to the fair office where I proudly deposited it on the desk of Kerth Nottingham, the fair secretary. How important I felt! I was absolutely sure there could be no fair without me.

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By now I'm sure that you think we kids knew nothing but swimming in the river and hiking in the hills or riding bikes or roller skating or going to

the movies or going to the fair. But that's not so. You couldn't go to the movies without seeing newsreels of the war between Ethiopia and Italy. Nor could you listen to the radio without hearing songs about the drought in Kansas and Oklahoma. Or songs about the Depression. Or of "riding on that new river train".

We listened to Lowell Thomas broadcast all over the world. We young guys followed the story of Paul Siple, the Eagle Scout who had gone to the South Pole with Admiral Byrd.

We were aware of the war clouds gathering over Europe and Asia, but we didn't worry. That couldn't affect us. Not us kids on Route 219 in Marlinton, West Virginia. Not us. It can't affect us. We're not going to worry.

## "And Back to School"

But now it was fall. We found our shirts and our red ball Keds and we prepared for the inevitable. The fair was over and we reluctantly turned our thoughts to school. And Lucille Gibson. And the gentle Miss Wilson. And the threatening Raymond Shrader, a vested J.Z. Johnson, with cigar and yardstick.

From October to May many of us looked like miniature farmers in ragtag jeans, freshly washed, starched and ironed. Others like little lumberjacks in from the white pine forests.

I often wore riding pants made of whipcord, and they whished when I walked. They were tucked into hightop cutter boots, laced to just below the knee. A fur-lined Macinaw jacket of wool or leather kept out the cold and the snow. And all of this was worn over scratchy wool longjohns that I just hated. Topping off this ensemble was usually a Lindberg cap with snap-on goggles. Just like Snoopy wears when he sets out to do battle with the dreaded Red Baron. I really looked good! I looked like Carmen Sharp!!!

We had to walk to school, some from as far as two or three miles, because the school buses were for the country kids, who shyly exited, carrying bags and buckets of country lunches wrapped in waxed paper.

The kids from town had to leave the grounds to eat at home, and to play a little. We had a whole hour.

We came from all directions at eight-thirty in the morning, each area comprising a group of its own. Those of us from Riverside and south joined the group from Jericho and north at the bridge. Those from upper and

lower Camden met us on Main Street. The uptown kids, wearing nicer clothes and carrying more books, came from the other direction.

We all converged en masse on the playground at Marlinton Grade School, awaiting the clang of the bell which signaled we should line up on the sidewalk, first grade in front, to parade past Mr. Johnson, who had just hidden his cigar stub in a secret place in a nearby telephone pole.

With somber but clean faces we filed into the front doors and the rear doors to assume our assigned seats. The heavy double doors clanged shut behind us. Summer was over.

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Some people considered me to be a ham in those days. I could sing and I liked to sing. And Edith May, our music teacher, knew it.

Charles Clendenen, the manager of the local movie house, was the father of three beautiful daughters. The youngest, Charlotte, was just my age, and a Shirley Temple wannabe. Well, not really. She had long brown hair and brown eyes, but she could sing and dance. And Edith May knew that also.

I hated Cotty Clendenen. But as often happens, fate threw us together. It must have been fourth grade. Miss Edith May, the music teacher, decided to have a school operetta, *Sleeping Beauty*. There was no other choice but for Cotty Clendenen to play the title role and just guess who was chosen to play Prince Charming. Oh, did the other guys in fourth grade love that! But I didn't care because it gave me the opportunity to fantasize that I was Dick Powell and Cotty was my Ruby Keeler. But, Lordy!, I had to sing that song and kiss her --- in public --- in front of Tom

Moore and Stanley and Palmer Zimmerman and Ed Johnson and all the guys.

Now, nearly sixty years have passed but I still remember that song . . . the words and the music. And I vow if I ever see Cotty Clendenen again, I'll sing that song to her and I'll kiss her. On the cheek, of course.

I remember something of every grade in grade school. My first grade teacher was a Miss McNeil. She couldn't help that the hero of our primer was named Baby Ray. But she could have kept the others from teasing me.

Miss Moore was my second grade teacher. She complimented me on my drawing of Winken, Blinken and Nod's wooden shoe. I had a really hard time with multiplication tables but that was the year that I met HLH.

In third grade we sang Lucia under Edith May. Miss Orda Hill was my teacher, and so pretty, she was one of the Hills that lived on the hill.

My fourth grade teacher was another Miss Hill, from uptown, but since her father was dying from cancer, Mrs. Burns was there more often than not. This was also the year of Sleeping Beauty.

Miss Woodell gave me a hard time in fifth grade, but she passed me anyway. And my friend Gilbert Jack shot himself through the leg while he was hunting.

Sixth grade, under grumpy old Miss Lucille Gibson, was kind of fun. She had me play me cornet for the class. I played the theme from Haydn's Surprise Symphony, if I remember correctly.



Raymond Shrader had us scared to death in seventh grade. I don't think I liked a thing about seventh grade except Science, but I couldn't convince him because he was the teacher.

Gentle Miss Wilson was my eighth grade teacher. She was the oldest teacher at MGS. She shamed me for not waiting until after the morning prayer to turn in a late paper. But I was in sort of a hurry and I'd had something else to do that you'll hear about in a few minutes.

Miss Pearl Carter was there somewhere but I'm not sure where. Probably with Raymond Shrader. I liked her and she was still alive at the age of 95 in 1995.

Mrs. Arnold Burns was the sub for Miss Hill during the fourth grade. She worried us all an awful lot by telling us part of the treatment for Mr. Hill's cancer was maggots.

Well, I'm sorry the above few paragraphs are not a little more complete but I did what I wanted to do. Now you may in turn name all of your teachers and highlight each year.

And, by the way, you may have noticed that many of the teachers were unmarried. That was the policy during the depression, not to hire married women whose husbands worked. Consequently, many young female teachers of the thirties went unmarried until later in life.

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One more thing before I close. Maybe it was my ego or maybe it was a search for self-esteem or maybe it was my admiration for two friendly state troopers named Bush and Shields who would wave at Juby and me as they drove up and down Route 219 in their Plymouth state car.

*Autism 10/24*

I wanted to be a member of the schoolboy patrol. To wear that white John Brown belt with the silver badge would be great. And with the urging of a few friends the principal allowed it, and I spent many cold mornings on the C & O railroad tracks there at CJ Richardson Hardware Store, keeping my friends from harm's way. Even if it did make me a little bit late for Miss Wilson's class.

So now you've heard it. Everything I had done in the past came together by the time I was in the eighth grade. And it gave direction to the rest of my life. My love for the outdoors and my friends led to my joining Troop 33. My talent with pencil and blade led to my hobby of whittling. My love of music led to the purchase of a little brass cornet, cost \$19.95. And all of these things in turn led in natural progression to my joining the Army Air Corps, of an eventual stint as a high school band director, almost thirty years as a professional with the Boy Scouts of America, and dozens of pencil-shaped Santas carved from pine and poplar during these latter years.

But these are things I will discuss in the next volume, if I ever get around to writing it.

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I've really enjoyed remembering my early life and my friends along Route 219. I hope you've enjoyed it as well. After all, it is for you.

## "EPILOG"

*In September of this year, 1995, my wife of forty-one years, Nancy, and I took a drive down through rural Medina County in our 1990 Ford Tempo. As we drove along we listened to the first taping of my recollections. When the tape ended she asked me, "Did writing this make you want to be a little boy again?"*

*I thought to myself, I have been a little boy again. All through 1995.*

*And all of my little friends were young again also.*

*And Jacob Marlin's little town on the Greenbrier, like Brigadoon, came to life again as it was in the thirties.*

*"No gifts have I of gold or jewels  
My room is cold and bare  
But all the silver sea is mine  
and all the scented air."*

*Lorence Hope*



*Recollections of My Early Life*

*For My Children's Children's Children  
Junie's*